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Opening extract from

Beryl Goes Wild

Written by

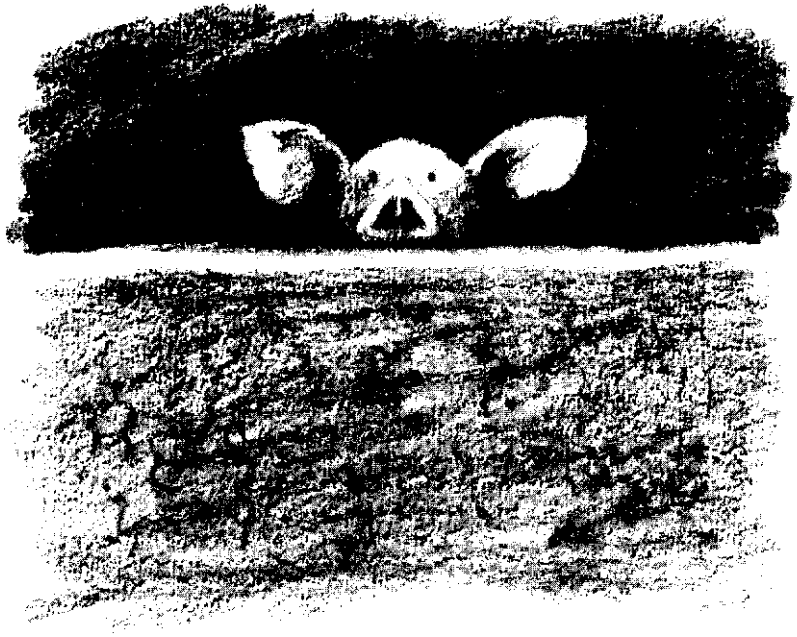
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BERYL'S DAY HAD COME

Beryl sat in her sty. It was the only place she had ever known; she had lived in it all her life. It was the sty where her mother had lost her life when Beryl was born. It was the sty where she'd seen them take her father away. It was small and made of concrete and it sat in the corner of a huge, hangar-sized barn. She could only just see over its thick walls to hundreds of other concrete sties. Beryl now shared

it with her Aunt Misery and her cousins.

The cousins didn't like Beryl and Beryl had given up trying to like them. It was something she had got used to. They sat in the opposite corner of the sty and stared at her, and she avoided their eyes and kept as quiet as a mouse, trying to appear as small as possible and hoping not to attract their attention. She spent most of her time daydreaming.

"The farmer's marking the largest young'uns!" hissed a neighbour over the sty wall.

"I wish they'd take you this time!" Aunt Misery grunted at Beryl. Her cousins sniggered, but Beryl was the smallest of them all because she was only allowed at the food trough after everyone else had finished. Aunt Misery glared angrily at Beryl. The largest of her cousins fell silent as he realised it must be his turn to be taken.

Beryl shifted uncomfortably and gazed at the familiar cracks and marks on the floor and the walls, hoping they would forget that she was there. She peered out of her favourite crack, where she



could see things in the outside world, which always seemed so bright. She sat and watched the colours and shapes and wondered what they could be. She had often thought about the outside and how magical and mysterious it seemed. She wondered what it would feel like to walk about out there.

The farmer strode down the alley towards her sty. As he came he slapped stickers onto the largest of the young pigs, and when their mothers wailed out in grief, he didn't seem to notice. He didn't stop or hesitate, he just kept striding and slapping on the stickers, *slap, slap, slap!*

"Hide behind me!" Aunt Misery whispered urgently to her brood and, at the same time, she thrust Beryl aggressively towards the alley gate with her snout.

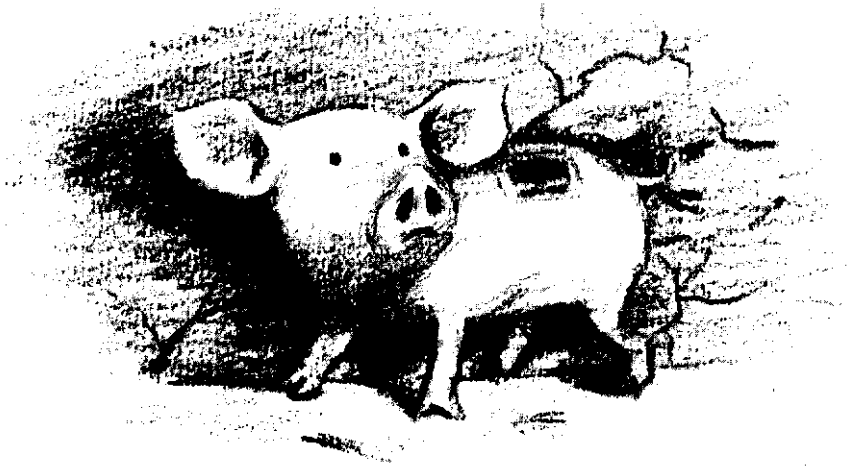
Beryl swallowed nervously as the farmer steadily approached. However unpleasant her life with her aunt and cousins was, Beryl didn't want to be pushed into the limelight. With every stride the farmer took towards her, she had a growing feeling of dread. Whatever was happening, wherever the chosen pigs were being taken, Beryl sensed it could only be worse than where she was now. She had seen a lot of pigs taken, and they were never seen again.

Suddenly the farmer was above her, panting and

swooping his arm over the sty wall, the sticker in his hand. Beryl gulped hard and squeezed her eyes tight shut.

SLAP!

She felt nothing! The farmer had stretched right over her and slapped the sticker onto the largest cousin's back.



Beryl couldn't help but feel a wave of relief.

"NO! Not my baby!" cried Aunt Misery, and for the first time that Beryl could remember, the cousins didn't say anything at all. They just went very, very pale.

Suddenly the barn doors creaked and groaned open, pouring light over the sties. Beryl blinked and squinted into the bleaching sunlight.

Two men with poles were shunting the chosen pigs out of their sties and into the alley. With all the pigs panicking and darting about, banging and crashing, squealing and wailing, the noise was deafening.

"I won't let them take you!" cried Aunt Misery. She prised the sticker off her son with her teeth, then levelled her cold stare at Beryl. Before Beryl could move, Aunt Misery lurched forwards and pinned her to the wall. *Slap!* She stuck the sticker onto Beryl's back.

The men were bearing down on Beryl's sty, zapping pigs as they came closer. Beryl tried desperately to pull the sticker off. She twisted and turned, but as hard as she tried, she couldn't reach it. It wasn't her turn, she wasn't big enough yet! Aunt Misery and her cousins were laughing now, as Beryl frantically tried to

rub the sticker off her back onto the wall.

"Here they come!" goaded Aunt Misery.

The men reached Beryl's sty and swung the door open. Beryl froze.

"That one," said the hairy man, and poked Beryl with his pole. *Zeeezt!* An electric jolt ran down her back and legs. Suddenly there was nothing but pain and then, just as suddenly, it was gone.

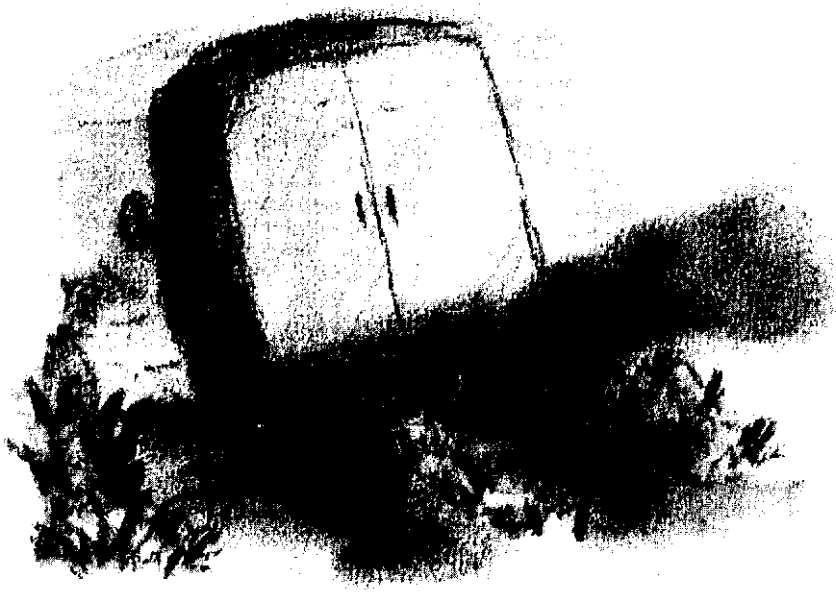
"Come on!" shouted Hairy. Beryl's head spun and she staggered, trying to find her feet. He stretched out with the pole to prod her again, but before it touched her, her mind cleared and she found her footing and sprang with all the energy she could muster into the alley and ran as fast as possible towards the light.

She was jostled up a ramp with the other stickered pigs. All around her they were squealing and panicking. Hairy kept prodding with the pole and as he did so pigs screamed out. Beryl was swept along as she became part of a body of pigs.



Everyone was pushing and shoving, and when Beryl reached the top of the ramp Hairy swung open some doors, pushing Beryl and the other pigs into the gloom of a lorry. Beryl was squeezed in so tightly she could hardly breathe. The doors came together with a thunderous crash and the last of the light was gone.

Beryl panted in the hot, stuffy darkness. All she could hear was the loud breathing of the other pigs. She thought of her father and how brave he had been, all that time ago when this had happened to him. As Beryl's eyes grew accustomed to the dark, she was overwhelmed by a sense of doom. She had no idea where they might be taking her – she had no experience of anywhere but her sty, so she couldn't imagine anywhere else. But she knew in her heart that wherever it was, it wasn't going to be good.



A ROAD TO NOWHERE

There was a spluttering noise and the engine roared into life. The lorry jolted and Beryl and the other pigs stumbled this way and that as they bounced down the farm track onto the road.

Beryl peered through a crack in the doors at the magical outside world. It looked so gentle and colourful and she wondered again what it would feel like to be out there in the sun. Then the lorry

lurched and Beryl and the other pigs were thrown against its side.

For the first time in her life, Beryl wasn't in her sty; she wasn't with Aunt Misery and her cousins. But although she was relieved to be away from their bullying, now all she could feel was rising panic.

With a surge of courage, she shook off her shyness like an unwanted blanket. "Where are they taking us?" she cried to the others. "We've got to get out of here!"

The other pigs stared at her. Some of them began to sob and call for their mums, but one large, gruff pig levelled his bully's gaze at Beryl.



"How do you think we can get out?" he frowned.

"I don't know," squeaked Beryl timidly, looking up at the metal walls of the lorry and noticing them for the first time.

"Even if we could get out, where would we go?" the bully-pig said gruffly.

"Out there!" insisted Beryl, getting a bit of her courage back.

"In the wild?" he snorted, and some of the others snorted, too.

"Why not?" cried Beryl. "It can't be any worse than where they're taking us!"

"How do you know?" he grunted. "Have you ever been out there? Out there, there's nothing to eat. Out there, there's nowhere to sleep. Only wild pigs can live out there. We'd starve, or die of disease! We don't know how to survive out there. It has to be better for us in here, we're indoor pigs!"

"But what if they're going to kill us?" Beryl pleaded.

"They wouldn't do that! Why would they kill us?

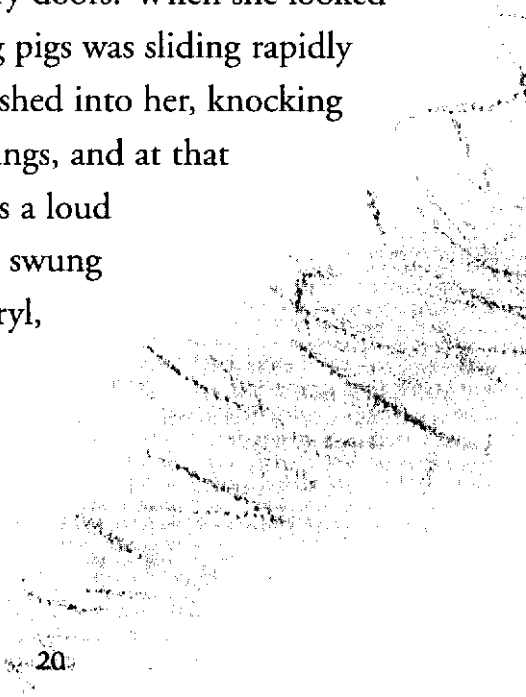
It'll be just the same as before, maybe even better!" Gruff smiled reassuringly at the others. He turned to Beryl, the remnants of his smile disappearing rapidly from his face. "Out there, wild pigs would definitely kill us! They'd eat us!" he snarled, poking his face right up against hers. "You're mad, and you're upsetting everyone, so shut up!"

Beryl backed away. She sank into silence and timidity, but inside her mind raced. If she knew anything at all, she knew she had to get out of the lorry somehow. Even if Gruff was right and they weren't going to die, she knew she didn't want to be stuck in another sty. Slowly Beryl was realising that what she wanted was something new. Something exciting, something with hope, something magical – what she wanted, was outside.

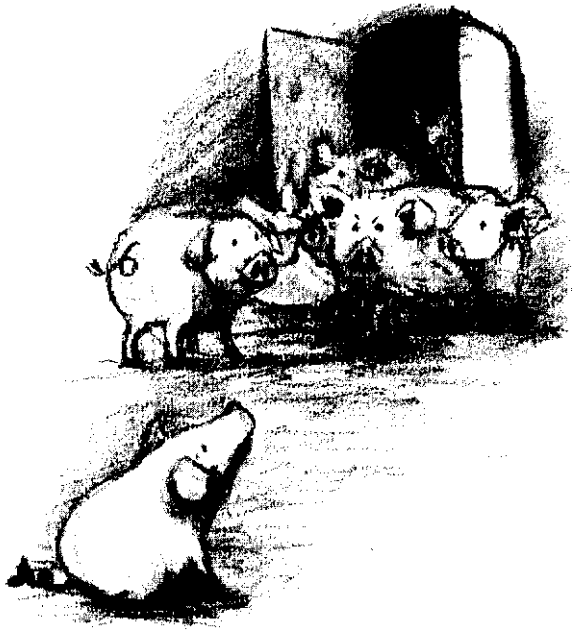
She sat with her back against the lorry wall opposite Gruff and the other pigs. They stared at her and she shifted uncomfortably under their scrutiny. Surely they must have thought about where they were going, so why were they all gazing at her as if she was

dangerous? She sat as still as she could, looking down at the floor, and hoping they would forget she was there.

With a sudden screech, the lorry lurched to the side. Beryl and the other pigs skidded together against one wall of the lorry. A moment later the vehicle lurched the other way, and everyone slammed against the opposite wall. Suddenly Beryl was slipping backwards. With a loud clang she was thrown against the lorry doors. When she looked up, a wall of panicking pigs was sliding rapidly towards her. They smashed into her, knocking all the air out of her lungs, and at that very moment there was a loud *clunk!* The lorry doors swung open and suddenly Beryl, terrified and gasping for breath, was flying through the air.







THE OUTSIDE

With a thump Beryl landed, tumbled down the road and rolled to a stop. Dizzily she looked up and saw Gruff and a few others lying in the road. The lorry screeched to a halt. Beryl pulled herself up onto her feet, staggering to find her balance.

"Now's our chance!" she shouted, but Gruff snorted and the other pigs just stared at her as if she was crazy. The driver's door opened.

"Oi! Come back here!" he shouted at the pigs, running towards them.

Beryl looked around in a panic. With all her strength, she made a giant leap towards some bushes, but beyond them the earth fell away in a steep bank. Head over tail went Beryl, down and down, crashing into the spiky undergrowth at the bottom of a gully.

"Oi!" shouted the lorry driver again.

Beryl froze. Had he seen her escape? All she could hear was her heart thumping against her ribs. Not daring to breathe, she stayed as still as a stone. She heard a clank as he lowered the lorry ramp.

"Come on, then!" he growled, and she heard Gruff and the others squeal and snort as they limped up the ramp to join the pigs still in the back of the lorry.

The lorry door slammed, then the driver's door, and at last the engine roared. Finally, the lorry rumbled and creaked away into the distance, leaving the woods to fall into silence.

The thick forest closed around Beryl as she realised she was completely alone. She licked the blood off

a graze on her leg which was beginning to sting. A breeze swept through the trees, picking up leaves and swirling them about her. As the leaves danced, Beryl looked up at the sky peeking through the branches. What had she done? Whatever had possessed her?



Maybe she should have listened to Gruff. She probably *would* have been better off staying in the lorry. She'd always been so timid, never saying anything to anyone, yet she had wanted to escape

and now here she was, in the middle of nowhere all on her own.

Aunt Misery was right; she'd always told Beryl that she was stupid and that no good would come of her. Beryl felt wretched and scared.

Why had she run?

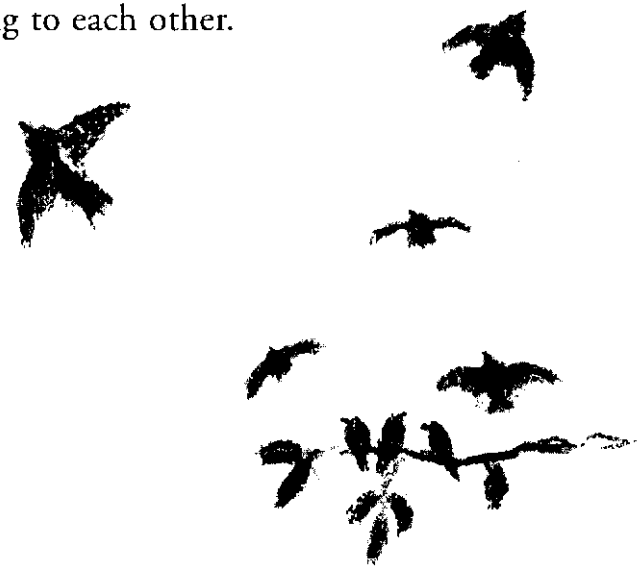
What if the pigs *were* going to a better place?

"Stop!" she said to the questions mounting in her head. She was here now, and that was all there was to it.

Gingerly, she stood up. She seemed to have aches and pains everywhere!

There was a rustle from nearby. Beryl froze. She could hear something moving about on the dry leaves. Slowly, she turned her head towards the sound. It was a tiny bird hopping about among the leaves and twigs, pecking at the ground. Beryl watched it going about its business. Then the bird noticed Beryl, and took to the air, flying high up into the trees. Birdsong filled the forest. Now there were birds wherever Beryl

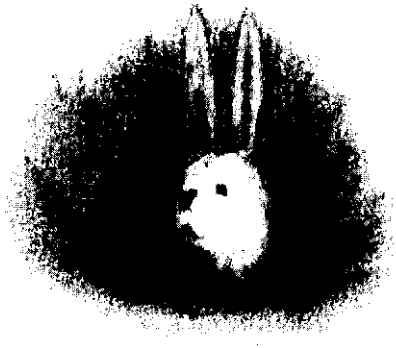
looked, perched in the trees, in the air and singing to each other.



Beryl started to pull herself carefully out of the gully, but the bushes had sharp spikes that gripped her skin and scratched her until she bled. She twisted and struggled, until at last she was free from the brambles, but some of the thorns had broken off in her skin. She was scratched all over. Her legs ached and her grazes and scratches stung.

She stood panting with the effort of getting free from the spiky bushes. Beryl hadn't thought the

outside would feel this way – wonderful one moment and painful the next. Through the crack in her sty it had looked so soft. She was frowning at the brambles when a strange creature popped up from a hole right in front of her. As she stared in surprise, it twitched its incredibly long ears in her direction. It seemed to be smelling the air. Fear gripped her. Beryl felt sure she should run as fast as she could, but she couldn't move. The creature hopped out of the hole, sniffed some more, and then took off into the undergrowth before Beryl had time to breathe.



Gruff's words filled her mind. "*We don't know how to survive out there!*"

"What am I going to do?" she sobbed.



MEETING THE WILD SIDE

A twig cracked nearby.

"Are you all right?" said a small voice.

Beryl looked around. She couldn't see anyone.

Out of the foliage stepped a scruffy little animal. Beryl blinked at it, trying to work out what it was. The creature was very muddy, with a pointed snout at one end and a curly tail at the other. Under all the brown, straw-like hair and caked-on mud, it

looked like a kind of pig.

Beryl's heart thumped hard against her ribcage as she realised what this strange creature must be.

A wild pig!

"Don't eat me!" Beryl cried.

"Why ever would I eat you?" asked the wild pig. "I saw you fall from the lorry. My name's Amber."

"I'm lost!" squeaked Beryl, as Amber came nearer. Beryl towered above her. She hadn't imagined that wild pigs would be so little. Beryl stretched her whole body upwards, to show Amber how much larger she really was.

"You can come home with me if you want. My Uncle Bert will know what to do," said Amber.



Beryl snorted. She didn't like that idea at all. If Gruff was right, she could catch something nasty from the wild pigs, or even end up as dinner.

What if that creature with the incredibly long ears came back and attacked her? Then her tummy rumbled – she was starving! She felt maybe she had no choice but to go home with Amber.

"OK," she said, and smiled nervously at her.

Beryl followed the wild pig, keeping her distance so it would be hard for Amber to try any funny business. As she stumbled along the track she kept stopping and looking around. She had seen a bit of the outside through the cracks in her sty, but actually being out in it was very strange.



"Who put all these trees here?" asked Beryl.

"I don't know. I think they've always been here," said Amber.

"It's very dirty," said Beryl. "Doesn't anybody ever sweep up?"

"Like who?" said Amber.

"The farmer?" said Beryl,

"Yeah, right!" snorted Amber.

Beryl didn't want to make this wild pig angry, so she changed the subject.

"How far is it to your uncle's home?" she wheezed. "I've never walked this far before and I'm getting very tired. The ground's got far too many lumps and bumps. Why isn't it flat?" She collapsed on the ground, huffing and puffing.

Amber frowned. "You can still see where we started from," she said. She began to wonder if she'd made a mistake helping this pork pig, but curiosity had got the better of her. She'd never seen or spoken to a pork pig before, though she'd heard stories about them from the other wild pigs. She'd

always thought that they would be bigger, somehow. "You'll get used to it," she assured Beryl.

"Who put all these flowers here?" Beryl asked.

"Same person as the trees, I guess," Amber said with a giggle. She noticed how Beryl was looking around at everything, as if she had never seen trees or flowers before.

"Try sniffing one. It's a lily," Amber said gently.

"Sniff it?" said Beryl. "But why? What does it smell of?"

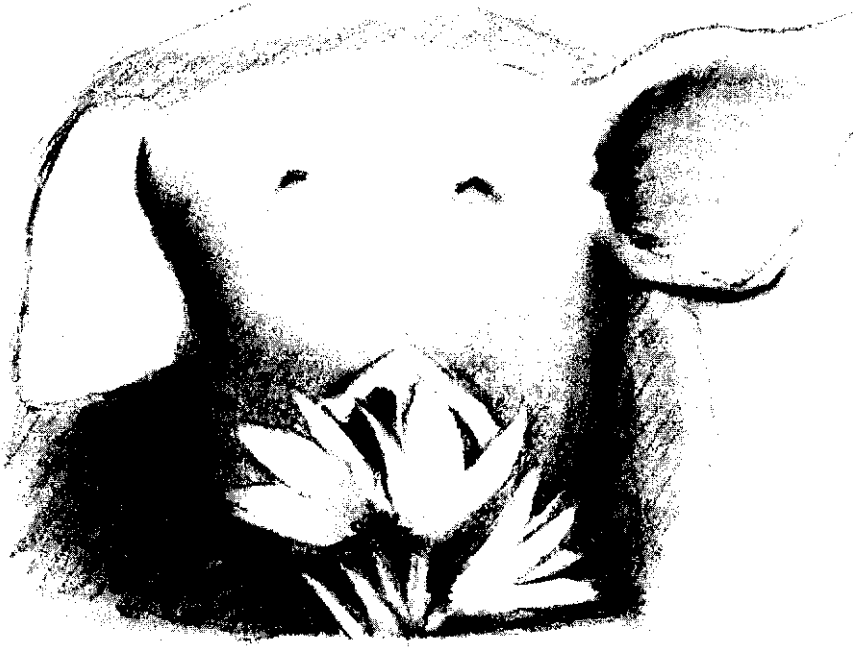
"Try it," Amber encouraged.

Beryl pulled herself up and edged around the flower. When she was safely facing Amber, with the flower between them, she gave it a quick sniff.

The smell was strong yet soft; it was summer; it was spring; it was the most wonderful smell Beryl had ever smelt. She shut her eyes and took a long, deep breath of it. At last she looked up at Amber with a delighted smile. Amber giggled.

"Do they all smell like that?" Beryl asked.

"They're all a bit different," said Amber.



The pink ones smelt sweet and the blue were really faint and delicate. Some of them hardly had any smell at all – Beryl had to bury her nose deep into them and give a really big sniff. Others she could smell long before she got to them.

Beryl forgot how tired and hungry she felt. She pottered happily along the path behind Amber, sniffing flowers to the left and to the right. She was so happy she began to sing as she sniffed.

"Sunny day,
Being so free,
I love flowers,
They're so pongee."

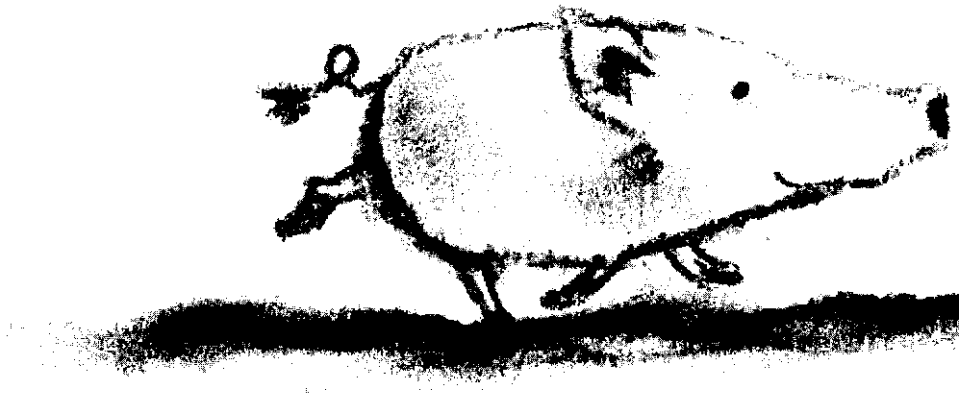
"What's that?" asked Amber.

"Oh, nothing," said Beryl, going pink.

Amber stared. She had never ever seen a pig go pink before, and Beryl went seriously crimson.

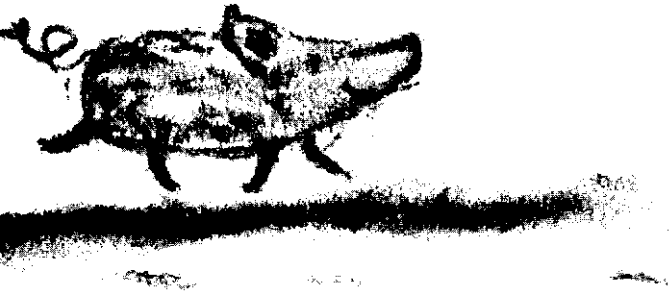
"Tell me, please! I really liked it," said Amber.

"I made it up, but I'm not a very good singer," said Beryl, clearing her throat. "But I'll teach it to you, if you like."



After a few attempts, Amber joined in. Then she made up a second verse. Together Beryl and Amber walked along the path singing and sniffing flowers, towards Amber's home and Uncle Bert. And Beryl completely forgot how tired and hungry and scared she was.

"Sunny day,
Being so free,
I love flowers,
They're so pongee.
Tiddly tee,
Tiddly tum,
A walk in the woods
Is so much fun."





MUSHROOMS AND MUD

Beryl's tummy rumbled loudly. "I'm starving!" she whinged. "How much further is it?"

"To where?" asked Amber.

"To where we can get something to eat," moaned Beryl.

"We can eat here," said Amber, gesturing around.

"Really?" said Beryl, looking about. "Where?"

"Through here." Amber pointed with her snout

and trotted off the path and into the undergrowth. Beryl hesitated. She watched Amber disappear into the bushes. Was this a wild pig trick? But Beryl's tummy rumbled again and that made up her mind.

"Wait for me!" she called, putting her head down and pushing through the bushes to where Amber had disappeared. It was so thick that Amber and Beryl had to fight their way through. They heaved and pushed through the dense foliage and then suddenly burst out into a clearing, where hundreds of brilliantly coloured flowers carpeted the ground.



Amber stopped and sniffed the air. "Yup," she said, with a sparkle in her eye. "I think this is

a perfect spot for lunch!" And with that Amber started to burrow and dig in the soft ground.

Beryl stared at Amber digging and grunting in the dirt. "What *are* you doing?" she cried.

"Looking for lunch," said Amber. "Isn't this what you do?"

"Absolutely not!" snorted Beryl. She flung her snout in the air with a snort of disgust. "*I* eat out of a trough!"

